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Sales of Chinese Cars Abroad Zip Past Competitors Struggling With Semiconductor Shortages
by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

China's electric car market is the world's largest, selling more than half of the world's total in 2020 as the country rushes toward totally phasing out gas-only cars by 2035. Sales-hungry competitors like Tesla are struggling to carve out a corner of the Chinese domestic market, and the voluntary recall of 300,000 Teslas this week isn't helping.

China's automotive exports more than doubled in the first half of 2021 despite a global shortage in semiconductors necessary for car computers, thanks to the country's early reopening after COVID-19 lockdowns, experts announced on Wednesday.

According to data from the China Passenger Car Association (CPCA), exports by automobile manufacturers on mainland China increased by 103% between January and May 2021, as compared to the year prior, shipping a total of 760,000 cars. The comparison period reflects the worst COVID-19 lockdown period for China, but the increase this year is remarkable in that it comes as other carmakers grapple with halted production lines.

"A lack of automotive chips around the world indeed benefited Chinese companies," CPCA secretary general Cui Dongshu told the [South China Morning Post](#). "The disease outbreak abroad has yet to be controlled and there remains growth potential for Chinese carmakers to tap."

After the mass outbreak of COVID-19 in China's Hubei Province in late 2019 and early 2020, Beijing implemented a near-total lockdown, sending millions of residents home for weeks and bringing travel to a halt. Because of the lockdown's thoroughness, the virus' spread was totally broken and the country was able to gradually reopen its society and economy after several weeks of closure, bringing production, trade and consumption roaring back by the middle of the year. However, few nations implemented as thorough a lockdown as China, allowing the virus to continue spreading and infect millions, keeping partial lockdowns in place for more than a year. Peter Chen, an engineer with the car component company ZF TRW in Shanghai, told SCMP that Chinese automakers had beaten the rush by placing their semiconductor orders in early 2020 as China's COVID-19 lockdowns began to end, giving them a decisive advantage in the rush for what has become a necessary part of modern car manufacturing.

"They have been ahead of foreign car plants in securing supplies of the much-needed chips," Chen said.

Globally, the automaking industry is expected to produce 3.9 million less units in 2021 thanks to the shortage, according to an estimate by consulting firm [AlixPartners last month](#). That amounts to \$110 billion in lost revenue.

Many major manufacturers, like Ford, General Motors and Hyundai, have shuttered some of their factories or halted production lines on certain models due to the shortage.

The devices themselves are not expensive, costing between \$1 and \$100, but the average automobile rolling off the production line has 1,400 chips in it, creating a bottleneck. The shortage has come about thanks to a variety of factors, nearly all of which stem from the COVID-19 pandemic. Lockdowns redacted chip output at a time that demand for them was increasing massively - not in cars, but in the electronic devices billions of people rushed to purchase so they could access their work, education and entertainment remotely from the safety of their homes in lieu of in-person gathering that could spread the virus.

Most of the globe's microchip foundries are in China and Taiwan, so trade interruptions due to lockdowns interrupted buyers' access to raw materials as well as finished products, and US [blacklisting of Chinese](#) firms like the Shanghai-based Semiconductor Manufacturing International Corporation (SMIC) - China's largest foundry - has blocked US carmakers in particular from accessing a major microchip source.

)To compensate for this vulnerability, US President Joe Biden declared it a "[national security issue](#)" earlier this year and on Tuesday, [Congress passed](#) a bill backed by Biden that would funnel \$200 billion into supporting US tech competition with Chinese firms, including \$53 billion for the US semiconductor manufacturing industry.

However, despite its advantages, the chip shortage hasn't left China's automakers unscathed, either. Car output fell by 4% in May 2021 as compared to May 2020, after having increased by 6.8% in April 2021.

Overall, Chinese industrial production rose by 8.8% in May 2021 over last year, which was also slower than the 9.8% increase in April. The slowdown has been blamed in part on local lockdowns in the cities of the Pearl River Delta, the center of China's tech industry.

"This is a normal cyclical slowdown after an economic recovery. In a nutshell, we can see the economic rebound is peaking," Hao Zhou, senior EM economist Asia, Commerzbank, [told Reuters](#) earlier this month. "The extent of the slowdown in the second half is key. So far, it's still normal and there's still room for the fiscal policy to play a part later in the year."

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Former US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld Dies at 88
by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

Having served as US defense secretary twice in presidential administrations more than 20 years apart, Donald Rumsfeld is both the youngest and oldest person ever to head the Pentagon. Donald Rumsfeld, who twice served as US secretary of defense, has died at the age of 88, according to a statement released by his family on Wednesday.

"It is with deep sadness that we share the news of the passing of Donald Rumsfeld, an American statesman and devoted husband, father, grandfather and great-grandfather. At 88, he was surrounded by family in his beloved Taos, New Mexico," a statement released by his family reads.

"History may remember him for his extraordinary accomplishments over six decades of public service, but for those who knew him best and whose lives were forever changed as a result, we

will remember his unwavering love for his wife Joyce, his family and friends, and the integrity he brought to a life dedicated to country."

Kieth Urbahn, a spokesperson for the family, told the [New York Times](#) the cause of Rumsfeld's death had been multiple myeloma, a type of blood cancer.

Rumsfeld is perhaps best known today for having been then-US President George W. Bush's secretary of defense from 2001 to 2006, during which time he oversaw the beginning of the US War on Terror and the invasions of Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003. Rumsfeld retired in 2006 under heavy pressure from NATO generals and admirals after nearly 3.5 years of a counterinsurgency war in Iraq that Rumsfeld, a major voice in favor of the invasion, had predicted would not happen.

Iraq was just one of several Middle Eastern nations that neoconservatives at the heart of the Bush administration, including Rumsfeld, his deputy secretary of defense, Paul Wolfowitz, and then-Vice President Dick Cheney, has pushed for the US to overthrow the governments of as part of what they called the Project for a New American Century. Others included Iran, Syria, Lebanon, Libya, Somalia, and Sudan.

Rumsfeld was previously Pentagon chief from 1975 to 1977 as well, under then-US President Gerald R. Ford. He also served in a variety of executive advisory roles, and represented Illinois in the US House of Representatives from 1963 until 1969 as a member of the Republican Party. Rumsfeld was born in Chicago in 1932. He became an Eagle Scout in 1949 and graduated from Princeton University with a degree in politics in 1952. He joined the US Navy in 1954, served as a naval aviator and flight instructor until 1957, and remained in the ready reserve until 1989, when he retired with the rank of captain.

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'Freedom is Untidy': Remembering The Late Donald Rumsfeld, Dead at 88
by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

Donald Rumsfeld's family announced on Wednesday that he had died from multiple myeloma, a type of blood cancer. Rumsfeld, 88, had been retired from politics for several years, but in his time was a titular figure on the world stage. Sputnik takes a look back at some of the major points in Rumsfeld's political career, which spans six decades.

Rumsfeld was born in Chicago, Illinois, on July 9, 1932. His family were German immigrants, and he attended a Congregational church. He graduated from New Trier High School and Princeton University, where he was an accomplished wrestler and majored in politics. He was also part of the Navy Reserve Officer Training Corps, and served as a naval aviator and flight instructor from 1954 until 1957 before shifting to the naval reserve, where he remained until 1989 when he retired at the rank of captain.

He began his political career as an administrative assistant to an Ohio lawmaker in Washington in 1957, but won office for himself as a Republican in 1962, representing Illinois' 13th congressional district from 1962 until 1969. According to his memoir "Known and Unknown," Rumsfeld was critical of the Johnson administration's handling of the Vietnam War, believing

South Vietnam was too dependent on the US, and that the US was too overconfident in its fight against the southern National Liberation Front and North Vietnamese Army.

First Administration Posts

He resigned in 1969 to join the administration of then-US President Richard Nixon, where he headed the Office of Economic Opportunity, an anti-poverty program that he personally opposed. During the year he worked there he hired two men who would later become key political allies: Frank Carlucci and Dick Cheney.

Rumsfeld cycled through several other Nixon administration positions before being tapped to head up Gerald Ford's transition to the presidency after Nixon resigned without a sitting vice president to replace him. He became Ford's defense secretary in 1975, where he directly clashed with George H. W. Bush, who was head of the Central Intelligence Agency, and Henry Kissinger, who was Secretary of State. He left office with Ford in 1977.

After several years in the private sector, Rumsfeld was appointed Middle East envoy by then-US President Ronald Reagan in 1983, putting him in charge of ensuring, among other things, that Iraq win the war it had started with Iran three years earlier. He traveled to Baghdad and met with the Iraqi leader, Saddam Hussein, for 90 minutes on December 20, 1983, during which time they discussed a number of topics of unity, including their opposition to Syria as well as Iran, and building an oil pipeline through Jordan to the Red Sea port of Aqaba. He left the position when Reagan left office in 1989.

In 1997, Rumsfeld joined the Project for a New American Century, a think tank set up by William Kristol and Robert Kagan to continue and expand Reagan's militaristic policies into the 21st century, where the US had become the world's sole military superpower after the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991. The think tank regarded the Republican Party's policies at the time as being insufficient to do this, helping to earn them the moniker of "neo-conservative."

Of the 25 politicians who signed PNAC's founding statement of principles, nine would later become members of the George W. Bush administration, including Rumsfeld and Cheney, but also Elliott Abrams, Eliot Cohen, Paula Dobriansky, Paul Wolfowitz, I. Lewis "Scooter" Libby, Zalmay Khalilzad, and Peter Rodman. John Bolton, Richard Perle, and Dov Zakheim were also PNAC members who served in the Bush administration.

Bush Administration

Just months after Bush was declared by the US Supreme Court to have won the 2000 election, the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks by al-Qaeda killed nearly 3,000 Americans, and Rumsfeld ordered the US military to DEFCON 3. At an emergency meeting of the National Security Council, Rumsfeld reportedly asked Bush: "Why shouldn't we go against Iraq, not just al-Qaeda?" The terrorist group was headquartered in Afghanistan.

As Pentagon chief, prosecuting the burgeoning War on Terror became his primary task, and the US launched an air campaign followed by a ground invasion of Afghanistan in October 2001, overthrowing the Taliban government and setting up a puppet state against which the Taliban has rebelled ever since.

Shortly after the 9/11 attacks, US Army [Gen. Wesley Clark](#) had a discussion with another senior officer in the Pentagon who revealed to him plans to go after not just Afghanistan, but a total of seven other countries in the next five years, including Iraq but also Iran, Syria, Lebanon, Libya, Somalia, and Sudan, he wrote in a 2003 book.

The plan dovetailed very closely with goals outlined to him by PNAC members like Wolfowitz, who had opined to him in 1991 that “with the end of the Cold War, we can now use our military with impunity. The Soviets won't come in to block us. And we've got five, maybe 10, years to clean up these old Soviet surrogate regimes like Iraq and Syria before the next superpower emerges to challenge us.”

‘There Are Known Knowns’: The Iraq War

Despite the suspicions of US intelligence, no firm evidence had been presented to show Hussein had continued to wield weapons of mass destruction after the 1991 Gulf War. Rumsfeld and other neo-cons continued to press for Iraq to be the next target of the War on Terror, however, creating the Office of Special Plans to [hound out enough evidence](#) to justify an invasion, and in February 2002, he uttered one of his most famous - and baffling - quotes of his career:

“Reports that say that something hasn't happened are always interesting to me, because as we know, there are known knowns; there are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns; that is to say we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns - the ones we don't know we don't know. And if one looks throughout the history of our country and other free countries, it is the latter category that tends to be the difficult ones.”

In March 2003, the US began its attack on Iraq, launching a “shock and awe” aerial bombardment prior to a ground invasion. Rumsfeld dismissed any notion the war would be long, costly, or demand a large number of troops, believing a swift strike to remove Hussein and his immediate cadres from office would be sufficient to turn Iraq into a reliable client state with some sort of democratic governance.

Instead, a massive insurgency erupted against the US occupation, and three-and-a-half years later, the war was no closer to being won and thousands of Americans and Iraqis were dead. Rumsfeld was [at one point in 2004](#) accused of using an automatic signing machine for the condolence letters mailed to the families of fallen US soldiers.

“Freedom is untidy,” [Rumsfeld remarked](#) in April 2003 in response to reports of widespread looting in the Iraqi capital accompanying the fall of Hussein's government, portraying it as part of the cost of the liberation.

possessed and threatened other nations with ever found, either. Months after the invasion, he continued to claim US intelligence knew the locations of the weapons, which were supposedly in the western desert near the Syrian border.

Rumsfeld also presided over the torture of detainees in US prisons like Guantamoo and Abu Ghraib, admitting his culpability in the scandal in 2004. The American Civil Liberties Union and other human rights groups filed several lawsuits against him on behalf of torture victims, but a [federal judge ruled](#) he could not “be held personally responsible for actions taken in connection with his government job.”

Estimates of the number of Iraqis killed in the US war in Iraq range from 110,000 by the [Associated Press](#), covering the years 2003 to 2009, to more than 654,000 [by the Lancet](#) medical journal, covering the years 2003 to 2006. US forces left Iraq in 2011, following the termination of a status of forces agreement by Baghdad. According to [Pentagon statistics](#), 4,418 US soldiers were killed in the Iraq War.

Political Departure and Final Years

As the war continued to worsen, Rumsfeld faced increasing pressure to resign, including from US and NATO generals, to which he eventually gave in on Election Day, 2006.

After his departure, Rumsfeld published his memoir in 2011. He made occasional forays into political life, criticizing then-Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, the NATO overthrow of Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi in 2011, and sounding off in support of Donald Trump's presidential bid in 2016. Until the end of his life, Rumsfeld remained adamant that he had made the right decisions about the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

[He died in Taos](#), New Mexico, surrounded by family on June 30, 2021, at the age of 88.

"History may remember him for his extraordinary accomplishments over six decades of public service, but for those who knew him best and whose lives were forever changed as a result, we will remember his unwavering love for his wife Joyce, his family and friends, and the integrity he brought to a life dedicated to country," his family said in a statement.

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Spy Chief of Peruvian Ex-Dictator Recorded Trying to Bribe Election Officials to Ensure Fujimori Win

by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

Keiko Fujimori, presidential candidate for Peru's right-wing party Fuerza Popular, stands accused of corrupt dealings and money laundering and has spent much of the campaign in pretrial detention. She is likely to go to prison if she loses the election, the final result of which she has managed to halt delivery for weeks.

Vladimiro Montesinos, the former head of Peru's National Intelligence Service under right-wing dictator Alberto Fujimori, has been revealed as attempting to bribe several senior election officials to turn the contested presidential election in favor of his former boss' daughter, Keiko Fujimori.

Montesinos made as many as 17 phone calls to Pedro Rejas, a retired military officer and former supporter of Fujimori in which he attempted to coordinate the bribing of three of the four members of Peru's National Jury of Elections (JNE) to make Keiko Fujimori, the candidate from the right-wing Fuerza Popular party, the winner. According to [the Guardian](#), Rejas turned these recordings over to the authorities, revealing the plot.

In one of the recordings, [Montesinos tells Rejas](#) just days after the election that he must "make them understand, the father or the girl ... we are trying to help in a common objective ... I am simply trying to help because if not they will screw themselves, the girl will end up in prison."

Peruvian investigative journalism outlet [IDL - Reporteros revealed](#) on Tuesday the close connections between Montesinos and Luis Arce, the JNE magistrate who attempted to resign last week after the body decided for the tenth time to reject Fujimori's calls to nullify up to 200,000 ballots. Their lasting connection has been Guillermo Sendón, a lawyer, Fujimori supporter and affiliate of Arce's, who Montesinos tells Rejas to use as an intermediary in one of the recordings. Sendón denied having recent contact with Arce in an interview with the outlet.

Fujimori has been [attempting to overturn](#) the results of the June 6 election, in which she received 44,000 less votes than Pedro Castillo, the candidate from the left-wing Peru Libre party. Fujimori has claimed that Peru Libre won through fraud, and has succeeded at stalling the JNE from declaring Castillo the winner for more than three weeks.

Earlier this week, she asked President Francisco Sagasti to appeal to international organizations to [audit the June 6](#) election. However, the Organization of American States, the European Union, the United States and other observers have not reported evidence of fraud, and have hailed Peru's National Office of Electoral Processes (ONPE) for a job well done.

The JNE has until July 28 to declare a winner, or Congress will have to decide.

Montesinos was the feared ex-spymaster of Alberto Fujimori, who ruled Peru with an iron fist from 1990 to 2000. He used the intelligence service to control the military, courts, and the media, ensuring continuing support for Fujimori's harsh neoliberal privatization programs and a brutal counterinsurgency war against the Sendero Luminoso communist movement.

Fujimori has been in prison for corruption and human rights crimes since 2007, and his daughter has pledged to pardon him if she becomes president. Montesinos has also long been imprisoned since 2001, having served 20 years of a 25-year sentence for arms trafficking and corruption committed under Fujimori.

[According to Andina](#), Peru's defense ministry has confirmed that he made the calls from the maximum security naval prison in Callao, and has removed three guards and one officer from their positions for the security breach.

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Apple Lifts Ban on Marijuana Delivery Apps as Three US States Legalize Cannabis
by [Evan Craighead](#)

Apple's App Store has historically reserved the right to block an application from the digital marketplace if it facilitated the sale of marijuana. Though controlled substances from licensed pharmacies were allowed in the App Store, legally operating cannabis stores, including delivery services, were prohibited.

With the July 1 enactment of recreational and medical marijuana laws across the US, legal cannabis businesses in at least three new states - Virginia, Connecticut and South Dakota will be able to reap the benefits of the latest Apple App Store policy change.

"Apps that encourage consumption of tobacco and vape products, illegal drugs, or excessive amounts of alcohol are not permitted on the App Store," reads the [new App Store policy](#). "Apps that encourage minors to consume any of these substances will be rejected. Facilitating the sale of controlled substances (except for licensed pharmacies and licensed or otherwise legal cannabis dispensaries), or tobacco is not allowed."

Legal cannabis dispensaries and delivery services seeking App Store approval are required to have geo-restriction capabilities that align with the user's corresponding legal jurisdiction.

Presently, 36 US states and Washington, DC, have legalized cannabis for medicinal use, and 16 US states and DC have gone a step further and legalized the recreational use of the psychoactive drug.

As of July 1, residents aged 21 and over in Virginia and Connecticut may now ingest marijuana for recreational purposes, following the passage of new legislation by state lawmakers earlier this year.

While South Dakota voters approved the legalization of both medical and recreational marijuana, constitutional concerns caused only the medicinal use legalization to go into effect on Thursday.

According to [South Dakota Judge Christina Klinger](#), the recreational use measure "has far-reaching effects on the basic nature of South Dakota's governmental system."

[Reform advocates have said](#) they will appeal the matter to the state's highest court.

As Apple seeks to keep up with the times, cannabis-centered outlet Marijuana Moment highlighted that Google has upheld its marijuana-related app ban for more than two years.

"We don't allow apps that facilitate the sale of marijuana or marijuana products, regardless of legality," reads the current Android app market policy, as reported by the outlet. Additionally, the digital marketplace prohibits "facilitating the sale of products containing THC [tetrahydrocannabinol], including products such as CBD oils containing THC."

Nevertheless, it remains likely that the increased legalization of marijuana in the US, along with the Apple App Store's new policy guidelines, may spark similar reform in Big Tech policy.

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NFL Fines Washington Football Team \$10 Mln, Informally Suspends CEO After Sexual Misconduct Probe

by [Evan Craighead](#)

Last year, Washington Football Team owner Daniel Snyder hired an independent counsel to conduct a review into allegations of workplace misconduct that were first laid out in a series of scathing reports by The Washington Post. At least 15 former, female employees of the team came forward and alleged they were victims of abuse and sexual harassment.

The National Football League (NFL) announced on Monday that the Washington Football Team (formerly known as the Redskins) will be forced to pay the league \$10 million following the conclusion of a misconduct probe led by Beth Wilkinson, of the Washington, DC, firm Wilkinson Walsh LLP.

Quoting NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell, the announcement laid out that the Washington Football Team operated in a "highly unprofessional" manner, particularly with regard to its female employees.

Goodell concluded that this toxic work environment fostered bullying and intimidation, and resulted in "multiple allegations of sexual harassment."

[Wilkinson was tapped to lead the investigation](#) after Julia Payne, vice president of communications for Washington's NFL team in 2003, and several other former employees of the team spoke to the Washington Post about their allegedly toxic office culture.

"I have never been in a more hostile, manipulative, passive-aggressive environment ... and I worked in politics," said Payne, who was an assistant press secretary in then-US President Bill Clinton's administration.

While Payne claimed she did not experience sexual harassment, Emily Applegate - the only alleged victim who did not elect to speak on the condition of anonymity - and at least 15 other women claimed otherwise.

Applegate asserted the daily sexual harassment and verbal abuse she and other female employees of the team were subjected to was not just ignored, but at times even encouraged by top executives.

Other women who spoke with the outlet claimed they previously entered into nondisclosure agreements (NDAs) with the NFL franchise, which made them fear possible litigation and financial ruin if they spoke on the alleged matter publicly.

The league detailed that the \$10 million obtained from the DC football team "will be used charitably," and fund a number of organizations, including those committed to anti-bullying, health relationships, character education and similar topics.

"They will also fund programs directed more broadly at improving the workplace, particularly for women and other underrepresented groups, and training and development programs throughout the league, with recipients identified with the assistance of respected third-party advisors," the NFL declared.

Furthermore, recently-named [Washington Football Team co-CEO Tanya Snyder](#) will take over day-to-day operations handled by her husband, Daniel Snyder. The team owner's decision to step down was "voluntary," according to NFL counsel Janet Nova.

It is worth noting that Snyder was not personally fined, or accused of sexually harassing employees.

Snyder issued a same-day statement following the announcement, asserting that he has "learned a lot" in recent months, despite owning the team since 1999.

"I feel great remorse for the people who had difficult, even traumatic, experiences while working here. I'm truly sorry for that. I can't turn back the clock, but I promise that nobody who works here will ever have that kind of experience again," [he said](#).

Snyder also declared that he agreed with Goodell's decision on the matter, and supports his wife handling the team's operations.

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'You're an Ahole': Former NSA Director Slams GOP Leader Over Probe Tied to Tucker Carlson's Claims**
by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

Fox News host Tucker Carlson recently prompted a media storm after claiming during a segment of his primetime show that officials within the US National Security Agency (NSA) were

monitoring his electronic communications. Although the agency has denied the allegations, Republican lawmakers have raised their own concerns on the matter.

Weighing in on the latest Tucker Carlson drama, former NSA Director Michael Hayden skipped the niceties late Wednesday and blasted a newly-launched effort by Republicans in the US House of Representatives to investigate the intelligence agency.

At the time, US House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-CA) had announced earlier in the day his decision to call on the House Intelligence Committee to probe [allegations](#) that the NSA was spying on Carlson.

Sidestepping all sense in decorum, Hayden, made his feelings on the investigation known by quote-tweeting McCarthy's release on the probe and calling the Republican lawmaker an "a**hole."

To date, Hayden's tweet has mostly received praise from netizens, with over 30,000 likes and nearly 6,000 retweets.

One user, Troy Headrick, [commented](#) that Hayden's tweet was a "perfect use of your Twitter account," whereas others went as far as calling the four-star general a "rockstar."

Hayden previously served as the CIA director from 2006 to 2009, as well as the principal deputy director of National Intelligence between 2005 and 2006. The US Air Force general held his director position at the NSA from 1999 to 2005.

While McCarthy addressed Carlson's claims in his quote-tweeted [statement](#), the California representative also cited other issues he had with the intelligence agency in his reasoning for the probe, such as growing concerns that the department was becoming increasingly politicized. "Given this disturbing trend, I've asked HPSCI Ranking Member Devin Nunes to investigate and find answers on behalf of the American people," McCarthy noted in the release. "The NSA cannot be used as a political instrument, and House Republicans will ensure accountability and transparency."

Although the NSA made the unusual move to publicly deem Carlson's claims as "[untrue](#)," the Fox News host has [stuck](#) to his allegations. During the Wednesday airing of his nightly show, Carlson threw his support behind the Republican-backed push for a congressional probe into the allegations.

McCarthy has yet to respond to Hayden's late Wednesday commentary.

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US Attorney General Temporarily Halts Federal Executions Amid Review of Trump-Era Policies by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

Under the Trump Administration, former US Attorney General William Barr resumed the use of capital punishment against federal inmates after the US Department of Justice had implemented a near 20-year halt on the practice.

US Attorney General Merrick Garland ordered a temporary stop on the scheduling of any federal executions over growing concerns regarding the fair treatment of inmates, a release from the US Department of Justice has revealed.

A late [Thursday statement](#) from the DoJ indicated that the moratorium on federal executions will remain for the duration of an ongoing review into the department's policies and procedures on the matter.

The review will specifically look into changes enforced under the Trump administration's reimplementing of capital punishment, such as the effects of using the lethal drug pentobarbital and practices to expedite capital sentences.

"The Department of Justice must ensure that everyone in the federal criminal justice system is not only afforded the rights guaranteed by the Constitution and laws of the United States, but is also treated fairly and humanely," Garland said in a [memo](#) to senior officials. "That obligation has special force in capital cases."

"Serious concerns have been raised about the continued use of the death penalty across the country, including arbitrariness in its application, disparate impact on people of color, and the troubling number of exonerations in capital and other serious cases," he continued.

"Those weighty concerns deserve careful study and evaluation by lawmakers."

The release notes that the review will be conducted in coordination with a "wide range of stakeholders" from medical experts to federal and state agencies, among other officials and organizations.

It remains unclear whether the directive will see a full ban against the death penalty in criminal cases.

An official familiar with the developments told [ABC News](#) that the directive is unlikely to impact the case of Boston bomber Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, whose death sentence was [overturned](#) in 2020 by the 1st US Circuit Court of Appeals. The DoJ has called on the US Supreme Court to [reinstate](#) the penalty.

The Trump White House resumed federal executions in July 2020 after the US Supreme Court cleared a lower court decision barring the administration's efforts on the grounds that new federal lethal injection protocols posed an unacceptable risk to inmates.

The first inmate to be administered the deadly dose of pentobarbital was Daniel Lee, who had been charged with the 1996 murder of an Arkansas family. Lee's final words were that he was innocent, and that he was in another part of the US when the killings took place.

Approximately 13 federal executions were carried out under the Trump administration, some of which were conducted just days before former US President Donald Trump left the White House. Prior to Trump, the US had a 17-year moratorium on capital punishment.

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Blistering Heat Wave Engulfing Pacific Northwest Sparks Wildfires, Spikes Death Toll
by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

Over the last several days, residents across the Pacific Northwest and in large parts of Canada have been forced to endure a scorching heat wave that has consumed the region and caused such severe conditions that hundreds have died. Blistering temperatures are expected to last through the weekend.

As the heat wave overwhelming the North American Pacific Northwest region has yet to let up its intensity, the current hot and dry conditions have served like kindling and ignited dozens of wildfires in the region as heat-related deaths continue to increase, effectively escalating an already tense situation for many first responders.

[The latest figures](#) released by the US National Interagency Fire Center indicate that there are currently 44 large active wildfires burning in the Pacific Northwest, specifically in California and Oregon. Estimates suggest that more than 667,000 acres have been charred as a result. In California, authorities recorded the Lava Fire in Siskiyou County as the largest wildfire of the 2021 fire season after it consumed upwards of 13,000 acres. An [incident report](#) states the blaze, which is only 25% contained, was started by a lightning strike and has grown due to gusting winds.

Further north in Canada's British Columbia, the situation is not much better. The [BC Wildfire Dashboard](#) has recorded 87 active fires, of which 64 have emerged over the last two days. Canadians living in the village of Lytton were forced to evacuate after a wildfire broke out nearby.

The Lytton fire emerged a day before the village recorded the highest temperature ever in Canada, a shocking 121 degrees Fahrenheit. The ECCC Weather British Columbia [reported](#) that the Tuesday temperature marked the third day in a row of broken local weather records. While wildfires have not been cited for any fatalities, the same cannot be said for the relentless heat. Lisa Lapointe, the chief coroner for the Canadian province, revealed earlier that at least 486 sudden deaths were reported between Friday and Wednesday, marking a 195% spike in fatalities during the normal five-day period.

"While it is too early to say with certainty how many of these deaths are heat related, it is believed likely that the significant increase in deaths reported is attributable to the extreme weather BC has experienced and continues to impact many parts of our province," Lapointe noted in a [Wednesday statement](#).

Health officials in Washington state and in Oregon have reported similar statistics after having recorded over 100 deaths, with figures only expected to rise.

Two cases in Spokane, Washington, saw a pair of individuals die inside their apartment due to apparent heat-related stress. This comes as [reports](#) have detailed that many homes across the Pacific Northwest are not fitted with air-conditioning units, as high temperatures are not a norm for the region.

Human-caused climate change has prompted increasingly severe heat waves, year after year, an occurrence that saw 2020 tied with 2016 as the warmest year on record, according to data collected by the US National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

Washington state Gov. Jay Inslee recently touched on the subject in an [opinion piece](#) published in the Seattle Times that underscored actions to address the "underlying cause of our changing world - climate change."

"Our recent discomfort is but the tip of the melting iceberg," Inslee wrote. "What we felt this week is just the opening act in a looming global disaster."

Rolling Blackouts, Struggling Businesses

Since last week, reports have detailed a variety of infrastructure setbacks caused by the heat wave, some of which include shuttered transportation services and rolling power outages meant to prevent a full grid failure.

Washington state energy company Avista Corp recently [told customers](#) to be prepared for more heat-related outages planned in coming days to “alleviate strain on the electric system.”

Estimates suggest that about 9,300 customers were the first to lose power on Monday in the Evergreen State before another round of individuals saw the lights go out on Tuesday.

The current extreme weather conditions have also brought on new pressures for businesses attempting to get back into the swing of serving guests and climb out from pandemic-induced financial hardship.

Many restaurants were recently forced to close their doors over a lack of air conditioning, or as a result of units that failed to sufficiently stave off the heat for customers and employees.

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Presidential Return - Cartoon

Since departing the White House, the former US president, Donald Trump, has repeatedly teased the idea of running for the post again in the 2024 election cycle. Following his latest appearance at the US-Mexico border, however, it seems he may actually be on the verge of spilling the beans on a highly-anticipated move.

Without voicing a decision, Trump suggested on Wednesday that he has made one on whether he will run for president, asserting that his brand of leadership is “needed.”

Fox News host Sean Hannity broached the presidential bid with Trump during a [Wednesday interview](#), asking, “have you made up your mind?” A coy Trump responded with a simple “yes.”

The former US commander-in-chief later acknowledged that while he is not interested in resuming political battles, “the country needs” him to lead the nation so as to better “take care of this country.”

At this point, it’s anyone’s guess whether Trump will jump back into the political fray. The former president has of late been holding his trademark [campaign-style rallies](#) in supportive locations the US, the first of which was held in June in Ohio.

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US Weather Agency Issues Warning as Caribbean Cyclone Season Opens With Hurricane Elsa

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) – The US National Hurricane Center issued a warning advisory on Friday to the Caribbean island nations of Barbados and St. Vincent and the Grenadines as Elsa, the first cyclone of the season, strengthens into a hurricane.

"Surface observations from Barbados indicate that Elsa's maximum sustained winds have increased to near 75 mph, and the cyclone is now a hurricane. A special advisory will be issued within the hour in place of the normal intermediate advisory," the National Hurricane Center said in a forecast on Friday.

The Meteorological Service of St. Lucia has also issued a hurricane warning while the Barbados service reported wind gusts up to 86 mph.

On May 20, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) released its 2021 Atlantic hurricane season outlook predicting a 60% chance of an above-normal season between June and November, a 30% chance of a near-normal season, and a 10% chance of a below-normal season with a likely range of 13 to 20 named storms, of which six to 10 could become hurricanes.

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US Adds 850,000 Jobs in June, Unemployment Rate Little Changed at 5.9% - Labor Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) - US employers added 850,000 jobs in June, the Labor Department announced on Friday, beating forecasts by more than 100,000, although the unemployment rate was virtually unchanged more as jobs recovery remained a stiff challenge more than a year into the coronavirus pandemic.

"Total nonfarm payroll employment rose by 850,000 in June, and the unemployment rate was little changed at 5.9 percent," the Bureau of Labor Statistics, a unit within the Labor Department, said in a statement.

In May, there were 559,000 job additions, while the unemployment rate was at 5.8%.

Economists polled by US media had forecast an average jobs growth of 720,000 for June.

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RPT - Rumsfeld Legacy Defined by Dysfunctional Weapons Programs, Illegal Wars - Ex-Officials

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) - Former US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld leaves behind wrecked weapons programs topped only by the lies he told to justify illegal wars, ex-security and intelligence officials told Sputnik.

Rumsfeld, widely considered the architect of the US invasions of Afghanistan in 2001 and of Iraq in 2003, died at the age of 88 in Taos, New Mexico on Wednesday. Rumsfeld as President George W. Bush's defense chief, had openly vowed to modernize the US military and transform the weapons development process.

"[Rumsfeld] did not fix the Pentagon's programmatic pathologies and made some worse," former Defense Department analyst Chuck Spinney said. "He magnified the perverse effects of

concurrency with his policy of spiral development, which is being carried out today in the rapid prototyping concept."

Spinney said Rumsfeld put weapons into production before they were fully designed and successfully tested in an operational environment, then claimed the US could "fix" them once deployed.

"This creates unworkable junk, huge profits for contractors and extortionary cost growth,"

Spinney said. "The F-35 [Lightning II Joint Strike Fighter] and Ballistic Missile Defense are two prominent cases in point."

Former FBI special agent Coleen Rowley, a leading Bureau analyst on the Iraq War, believes Rumsfeld should be remembered for the rationales he fabricated as a basis to invade other countries.

"While the media obituaries are taking Rumsfeld to task for 'mistakes' he made in prosecuting the wars on Iraq and Afghanistan, he seems to get a pass for having concocted all the lame and false justifications used to launch the illegal wars in the first place," she said.

Former senior CIA analyst Ray McGovern recalled how Rumsfeld liked to say "some people lie and think they can get away with it."

"And he Rumsfeld personified personal proof of this dictum of his," McGovern told Sputnik. "He was never confronted about his lies."

During his tenure as US defense secretary, Rumsfeld had come under fire for the alleged mistreatment of prisoners at Guantanamo Bay and enhanced interrogation techniques that many rights groups believe amounted to torture. He was also known for witty - yet controversial - quotes including the now famous (or infamous) "there are known unknowns" about intelligence matters.

Rumsfeld served as US Defense Secretary twice, under President Gerald Ford in the 1970s and in the George W. Bush administration from 2001-2006. He also served in the US Navy from 1954 to 1957 as a pilot and a flight instructor, then continued his service as a reservist until 1975, according to the Pentagon. In a statement on Wednesday, current Pentagon chief Lloyd Austin said he was saddened to hear about Rumsfeld's death, hailing him for his "probing intellect," and abiding commitment to the United States.

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RPT - St. John of Shanghai Prayed Long Time at Church Altar on His Last Day - Witness
WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) - One of the most venerated saints of the Russian diaspora, Archbishop John of Shanghai and San Francisco, spent the last day of his life in extraordinarily long prayers, his spiritual son and witness to his death Patrick Bredin told Sputnik.

The Russian Orthodox Church will commemorate the 55th anniversary of Archbishop John's blissful depart on July 2. He died on that day in 1966 in Seattle, Washington, where he was visiting the St. Nicholas Orthodox cathedral with the wonder-working Kursk Root icon of the Mother of God.

Patrick Bredin, who was born in Malaysia and became Russian Orthodox after meeting with Archbishop John in China in 1938, had come to Seattle from Vancouver, Canada, to accompany the archbishop and the Holy icon.

"The last weekend of St. John's life, my very close friend and I were in Seattle to bring the archbishop to Vancouver with the wonder-working icon," Bredin said. "During that last day, I remember, he was doing a lot of praying in the altar after the Divine Liturgy."

After the archbishop's death, the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia (ROCOR) leadership ruled immediately to transfer his body to his home city of San Francisco for the funeral.

"There were a lot of conversations and discussions about how to get his body back to San Francisco," Bredin said.

He described St. John as one of the people he was closest to, someone who paid more attention to him even than his own father.

"It is hard to express the feelings I had when he passed away. It was very sad to me. He was the closest father I had in my life," Bredin said.

Archbishop John, whose secular name Mikhail Maksimovitch, was born in 1896 in the Russian Empire. He left in 1921 after the Bolshevik revolution together with his family and settled in Yugoslavia as did many Russian emigres at the time. He graduated from Belgrade University with a degree in theology and was tonsured a monk. In 1934, he was ordained a bishop of the ROCOR and assigned to the diocese of Shanghai.

Bredin came to Shanghai, where his father resided after his divorce, in 1938, as a 12-year-old boy. He was delivering milk in the city of Laoshan when he met St. John.

"The Archbishop asked me, would I like to be Orthodox? My step-mother was Russian, so I answered, yes, I do," Patrick recalled. "St. John told me: 'You can be baptized. Go this coming Sunday to the church in Laoshan.'"

Shortly thereafter, Patrick was baptized with the name of Andrew and, advised by Archbishop John, began studying in the Russian school.

"St. John took me under his wing. He absolutely loved all the children in our school. He taught me to become an altar boy," Bredin noted. "I even was able to come to his cabinet where he always worked and prayed. How can I ever forget that? Never in my life."

St. John of Shanghai and San Francisco was canonized by the ROCOR in 1994. His relics rest in the Cathedral of the Theotokos, Joy of All Who Sorrow in San Francisco.

Fourteen years later, in 2008, he was glorified by the Bishop's Council of the Russian Orthodox Church for all-church veneration.

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RPT - Miami Residents Express Solidarity, Support for Surfside After Building Collapse

SURFSIDE, July 1 (Sputnik) - Miami residents are providing support to nearby Surfside after the collapse of a residential building there and amid continuing search and rescue efforts for survivors.

The owners of the local business Flowers For Heroes said they have been continually bringing flowers to memorial site of the collapsed building in Surfside.

"We are taking the flowers on behalf of the initiative called Flowers For Heroes. With other local flower distributors we are taking we are taking them to the memorial to place them to honor all the victims and their families," owner Tania Sequera told Sputnik.

Sequera said she and her two daughters were loading their vehicle with multiple boxes and bouquets donated by local companies and distributors. However, she said they had to wait to deliver them until the authorities reopened the adjacent streets when President Joe Biden arrived in the area.

"It's very important to have solidarity with the people, with the families of the victims," Sequera said. "It's a tragedy. I think it's very important what is happening here and to heal. It is very painful."

Sequera also said she and her daughters have been at the site of the incident since the very beginning and will remain there to provide any support to the affected people. She said she had resided in Surfside in the past and described it as a quiet and friendly place.

Many people are delivering flowers themselves to the site. One local resident told Sputnik that he comes there every day and has not lost hope that more people will be found alive in the rubble.

"These people are my neighbors. These are the people I have seen in the supermarket and they deserve respect," the resident said. "We are in morning. Of course, we have hope and I have a lot of faith in God."

Earlier on Thursday, Miami-Dade County Mayor Daniella Levine Cava said search and rescue efforts were halted overnight due to concerns about the standing structure's stability and will resume once it is safe to do so. She also said Biden's arrival will not affect the operations on the ground.

The death toll stands at 18 and 147 residents of the building are still unaccounted for, according to the local authorities.

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US Attorney General Imposes Moratorium on Federal Executions - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) - US Attorney General Merrick Garland issued a moratorium on federal executions amid a review of policies and procedures, the Justice Department said in a statement.

"Today, Attorney General Merrick B. Garland issued a memorandum imposing a moratorium on federal executions while a review of the Justice Department's policies and procedures is pending," the release said on Thursday. "The Attorney General's memorandum requires the reviews to include consultations with a wide range of stakeholders including the relevant department components, other federal and state agencies, medical experts and experienced capital counsel, among others."

No federal executions will be scheduled while the the reviews are pending, the release said.

The US Deputy Attorney General Lisa Monaco will lead a team to review Trump-era rules that permitted methods of execution beyond lethal injections and authorized the use of state facilities and personnel in federal executions, the release said.

Moreover, the team will review Trump-era policies that expedited executions of capital sentences, and the risk of pain when using the drug pentobarbital in lethal injections.

President Donald Trump's administration executed 13 inmates on death row after it resumed federal executions last July following a 17-year hiatus.

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Miami-Dade County Mayor Says They Resumed Building Collapse Search And Rescue Efforts

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) - Search and rescue efforts at the site of the Surfside condo collapse have resumed after a brief pause for engineers to evaluate the safety of the standing structure, Miami-Dade County Mayor Daniella Levine Cava told reporters.

"I'm very glad that I can share with you that starting around 4:45 p.m. [local time] today, we resumed our search and rescue efforts," Cava said on Thursday.

The mayor added that officials will proceed with plans to likely demolish the remaining structure of the building that is still standing.

Local emergency officials said they have contingency plans in place in case Tropical Storm Elsa threatens the site.

The death toll in the collapse continues to stand at 18.

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California Sets Date for Governor Recall Vote on September 14 - Elections Office

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) - California has set the date for the gubernatorial recall election for September 14, the Elections Office said in a press release.

"Lieutenant Governor Eleni Kounalakis issued a proclamation today declaring a special gubernatorial recall election on September 14, 2021 to determine whether Gavin Newsom, Governor of the State of California, shall be recalled, and if the majority vote on the question is to recall, to elect a successor," the release said on Thursday.

In April, California residents gathered 1.6 million petition signatures, exceeding the minimum threshold of 1.49 million to launch a recall.

The recall effort started with California residents who were upset over Governor Newsom's lockdown and other draconian measures, poor economic policies and other issues.

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Blinken Discusses Afghan Peace Settlement With Uzbek, Tajik Counterparts - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken discussed peace and cooperation in Afghanistan with his Uzbek and Tajik counterparts during separate bilateral meetings in Washington, State Department Spokesperson Ned Price said in a statement.

"The Secretary thanked the Foreign Minister [Abdulaziz Kamilov] for Uzbekistan's continued support for a just and durable peace settlement in Afghanistan. He also welcomed Uzbekistan's focus on regional connectivity, including closer political and economic cooperation with Afghanistan in ways that would support prosperity and growth across Central and South Asia," Price said on Thursday.

Tajik Foreign Minister Sirojiddin Muhridin likewise agreed that a peaceful settlement to the conflict in Afghanistan would advance integration and economic growth in the region.

Price added that Blinken expressed a desire to further human rights, freedom, and economic development in Central Asia, including through the C5+1 diplomatic platform.

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US Awards Raytheon \$2Bln Contract for Long Range Standoff Weapon System - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) - Raytheon Missiles and Defense has won a \$2 billion US Air Force contract to produce a Long Range Standoff new nuclear-armed cruise missile which is projected to have a range of 1,500 miles by the end of this decade, the Department of Defense said.

"Raytheon Missiles and Defense [of] Tucson, Arizona, has been awarded an approximately \$2 billion ...contract for the engineering and manufacturing development (EMD) phase of the Long Range Standoff (LRSO) Weapon System," the Defense Department said in a press release on Thursday.

The objective at the end of EMD phase is to demonstrate full production readiness, the release said.

Work on the project will be performed in Tucson, Arizona and is expected to be completed in February 2027, the release added.

The LRSO is a nuclear-armed, air-launched cruise missile to develop the current AGM-86 Air-Launched Cruise Missile and is expected to be carried on multiple aircraft, including the B52 and B-21 bombers, according to published reports.

The Defense Department has said the LRSO program seeks to develop a weapon that can penetrate and survive integrated air defense systems and prosecute strategic targets that will reach initial operational capability before the retirement of the ALCM cruise missiles around 2030.

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US Jails Last of 4 Defendants for Bribery Tied to Bloomberg Construction - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) - Vito Nigro, a former executive for Turner Construction, received prison sentence of more than four months for evading taxes on bribes received from building projects for the Bloomberg financial firm, the US Justice Department said.

"[Nigro] was sentenced today in Manhattan federal court to 51 months in prison for evading taxes on more than \$1.8 million in bribes he received from building sub-contractors, in connection with a number of building projects undertaken for Bloomberg," a Justice Department press release said on Thursday.

The Justice Department also detailed three earlier convictions on similar tax-evasion charges for a former Turner executive and two former Bloomberg executives. In all, the four defendants have pleaded guilty to failing to pay taxes, between 2010 and 2017, on bribes exceeding \$5.1 million, the release said.

Ronald Olson, a former vice president at Turner, was sentenced on June 15, 2021 to 46 months in prison, for evading taxes on more than \$1.5 million in the same scheme, the release added. In addition, Anthony Guzzone, a former director of global construction at Bloomberg, was sentenced on January 19, 2021, for evading taxes on more than \$1.45 million, and Michael Campana, a subordinate construction manager at Bloomberg, was sentenced on July 24, 2020 to 24 months in prison, for evading taxes on more than \$420,000, according to the release.

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Canada Top Diplomat Praises Jordan's Role in Israel-Palestinian Relations

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) - Canadian Foreign Minister Marc Garneau commended Amman for its role in Israel-Palestine relations during a meeting with Jordanian Prime Minister Bisher Al-Khasawneh and counterpart Ayman Safadi.

"Minister Garneau restated Canada's recognition of Jordan's custodianship over the Holy Sites in Jerusalem and conveyed Canada's appreciation of Jordan's constructive efforts and recognition of the key role it plays towards a comprehensive, just and lasting peace for the Palestinian and Israeli peoples," Global Affairs Canada said in a statement on Thursday. The minister and his team expressed a desire to work together with Jordan counterparts on advancing peace efforts in the Middle East.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) -

US-CHINA RELATIONS

- * The United States is concerned about China's accelerated buildup of its nuclear arsenal, US State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Thursday.
- * The United States is aware of Chinese President Xi Jinping's strong remarks about Beijing's adversaries but will not comment on them, Price said.
- * China and ten other governments demonstrate a pattern of engaging in various forms of human trafficking, the US State Department's 2021 Trafficking in Persons Report said.

NORD STREAM 2

- * The US House of Representatives Appropriations Committee has advanced a measure that would block the US president from waiving Nord Stream 2 sanctions in fiscal year 2022.

LAVROV-KERRY CLIMATE TALKS

- * Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and US Special Presidential Envoy for Climate John Kerry discussed climate issues and agreed to continue bilateral contacts during a phone conversation on Thursday, the Russian Foreign Ministry said.

TURKEY LEAVES ISTANBUL CONVENTION

- * Turkey has been added to the US' 2021 Child Soldiers Prevention Act (CSPA) List for its support for non-state armed groups that use child soldiers, a senior State Department official said on Thursday.
- * US State Department spokesperson Ned Price said Turkey's withdrawal from the Istanbul convention on preventing and combating violence against women was deeply disappointing.

US, UK ISSUE ADVISORY ON RUSSIAN CYBER ACTIVITIES

- * The US and UK intelligence communities issued an advisory on Thursday warning of alleged malicious cyber activities by the Russian military intelligence unit, known as the GRU.

NEW YORK INDICTS TRUMP ORGANIZATION CFO

- * Trump Organization CFO Allen Weisselberg on Thursday pleaded not guilty to charges of tax crimes charges ranging over 15 years while running the business empire of former US President Donald Trump.
- * Trump said the indictment is a continuation of the political witch hunt by the Democrats, with New York State taking over the assignment while dividing the United States like never before.

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US Pleased to Resume Annual Bilateral Consultations With Tajikistan - Blinken

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) - Washington is pleased to resume annual bilateral consultations with Tajikistan, US State Secretary Antony Blinken said on Thursday following the meeting with Tajikistan Foreign Minister Sirojiddin Muhridin in the US capital.

"We are pleased to resume our annual bilateral consultations with Tajikistan," Blinken said, adding that the countries have a lot of work to do across series of important issues, including security, democracy and economy.

Muhridin added that the US is a reliable partner of Tajikistan in a number of spheres, including Afghanistan and regional security. He noted that in 2022, the US and Tajikistan will celebrate 30 years of bilateral diplomatic partnership.

The meeting comes amid heightened concerns that the US withdrawal from Afghanistan may spiral renewed violence in Afghanistan and neighboring countries, including Tajikistan.

Tajikistan has recently put its armed forces stationed on the border with Afghanistan on high alert amid the deteriorating security situation in the neighboring country. The move came after the Taliban militants attacked a border crossing with Tajikistan, Sher Khan Bandar, in the Kunduz province of northern Afghanistan. The Afghan forces were unable to repel the attack and had to retreat and seek shelter in the neighboring country. The Tajik authorities report a complicated situation at the border, with up to 100 Afghan soldiers being killed, wounded or taken prisoner by the Taliban.

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USMCA Trade Reps to Meet in Mexico City on July 7 For Trade Deal Anniversary – Statement

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) – US, Canada and Mexico's trade envoys will convene in Mexico City on July 7 to commemorate the first anniversary of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) successor pact, Global Affairs Canada said on Thursday.

"To commemorate the first anniversary of the entry into force of the Canada-United-States-Mexico Agreement (CUSMA), the Honourable Mary Ng, Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade; Katherine Tai, United States Trade Representative; and Tatiana Clouthier Carrillo, Mexico's Secretary of Economy, will meet in Mexico City on July 7," the Canadian government's diplomatic arm said in a statement.

The trade envoys hope to build on the achievements of the Agreement's first year and the results of the Free Trade Commission meeting held in May, the statement read.

The USMCA entered into force on July 1, 2020, replacing the 1993 NAFTA. The new pact essentially modernizes NAFTA, including rules regarding labor standards.

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IMF Says Sees US Economy Growing 7% in 2021, Around 5% Next Year

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) - The US economy is expected to grow at its fastest pace in a generation with Gross Domestic Product projected to expand 7 percent this year and 5 percent in 2022, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) said on Thursday.

"Growth in 2021 is expected to be around 7 percent, the fastest pace in a generation, with modest risks to the upside," the IMF said in its US economic outlook. "This strong economic performance should continue into 2022, with growth of around 5 percent."

The IMF, however, expressed concerns about a potential drag on GDP from the US labor market, which it said lagged growth in other sectors of the economy.

"Significant labor market slack remains which should serve as a safety valve to dampen underlying wage and price pressures," the IMF said.

Inflation expectations were, meanwhile, expected to "remain well-anchored" despite a ramp in price pressures, it added.

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Biden Says State Dept. Expediting Visas for Families of Miami Housing Collapse Victims

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) - The US Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) will be providing those affected by the building collapse in Miami and the State Department will be expediting visas for their families, President Joe Biden said on Thursday.

"FEMA is going to provide temporary housing and other urgent needs for the survivors. [The] State Department is expediting visas for family members from other countries, and there are from Latin America, South America, Europe, [and] Israel," Biden said.

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Biden Says No Firm Proof of What Caused Miami Building Collapse

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said on Thursday there is no firm evidence on what may have caused the 12-story Surfside condo building to collapse.

"We don't have any firm proof of what's happened," Biden told reporters.

The death toll stands at 18 and 147 residents of the building are still unaccounted for, according to the local authorities.

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US Aware but Will Not Comment on Xi's 'Broken Heads and Bloodshed' Remarks - Price

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) - The United States is aware of Chinese President Xi Jinping's strong remarks about Beijing's adversaries but will not comment on them, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Thursday.

During an address commemorating the Chinese Communist Party's centenary, Xi cautioned that any country that will try to "bully" Beijing will "face broken heads and bloodshed" by the "Great Wall of the 1.4 billion Chinese people."

"We are aware of President Xi's remarks - we've made a note of them - but we're not going to comment on the specifics," Price said during a press briefing on Thursday.

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US Renews Travel Advisory For Guatemala, Warns Against Visiting Nicaragua - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) – The United States extended an earlier advisory for Guatemala with an added warning to not travel to Nicaragua, the State Department said on Thursday

"The Department of State renewed its Travel Advisory for Guatemala on July 1, 2021. The Department continues to advise travelers to not travel to Nicaragua. This replaces the previous Travel Advisory issued on June 16, 2021," a department press release said.

The US renewed a Level 4 "do not travel" advisory for Nicaragua on Tuesday.

With Thursday's announcement, Guatemala remains subject to a Level 3 "reconsider travel" health advisory from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) due to elevated levels of COVID-19 and a similar warning from the State Department due to the prevalence of violent crime and gang activity, the release said.

The advisory designates three areas of Guatemala as especially high risk – areas that have been declared off-limits to US diplomatic personnel due to crime.

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US 'Beyond Fed Up' With Attacks by Yemen's Houthis - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) - The United States has lost any patience with Yemen's Houthi movement following the latest string of attacks by the rebel group, US State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Thursday.

"We are beyond fed up," Price said during a press briefing, responding to a question regarding Washington's level of patience with the rebel movement.

Price said the State Department is "horrificed" by the Houthi missile attack on a residential neighborhood in the Yemeni city of Marib, which, according to reports, killed three and injured ten.

Price said it is "long-past time" to end conflict and address the dire humanitarian situation following years of armed conflict.

Yemen has been engulfed in an armed conflict between the government forces and the Houthi movement for more than six years. The situation further deteriorated after the Saudi-led coalition of Arab states entered the conflict on the side of the government in 2015.

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Trump Organization Charged With 15 Years of Tax Crimes, CFO Pleads 'Not Guilty'

NEW YORK CITY, July 1 (Sputnik) - The Trump Organization was charged in a New York court on Thursday with a litany of tax crimes ranging over 15 years that its Chief Financial Officer Allen Weisselberg pleaded not guilty to and which the former US president called "politically motivated."

Donald Trump himself was not charged although the indictment against the Trump Organization and Trump Payroll Corporation described a scheme that benefited people other than Weisselberg. "One of the largest individual beneficiaries of the defendants' scheme was Allen Weisselberg," said the charge sheet laid out against the CFO who was brought into the courtroom in handcuffs, before his not guilty plea was recorded against 15 felony counts that began around 2005 and included a scheme to defraud, conspiracy, grand larceny and falsifying of business records.

Trump lashed out at the charges against his business empire. "The political Witch Hunt by the Radical Left Democrats, with New York now taking over the assignment, continues. It is dividing our Country like never before!" the former president said in a statement.

New York Attorney General Letitia James said the investigations against the Trump Organization do not end with Weisselberg's indictment. "This investigation will continue, and we will follow the facts and the law wherever they may lead," James said in a statement distributed via Twitter.

According to the charges unsealed in court, the scheme led by Weisselberg allowed certain Trump Organization employees to substantially understate their compensation from the company, so that they could — and did — pay federal, state, and local taxes in amounts that were significantly less than the amounts that should have been paid.

Trump Corporation and Trump Payroll Corp were also accused of failing to withhold income taxes on wages, salaries, bonuses and other forms of compensation paid to certain employees, according to the charges that did not name any individual other than Weisselberg.

In the case of the chief financial officer, extensive details were provided on how he received indirect employee compensation from the Trump Organization in the approximate amount of \$1.76 million. He was accused of evading approximately \$556,385 in federal taxes, around \$106,568 in state taxes, and about \$238,159 in New York City taxes. He was also said to have falsely claimed and received approximately \$94,902 in federal tax refunds and approximately \$38,222 in state tax refunds, to which he was not entitled.

The charges even cited unreported payment of rent, utility, and garage expenses for Weisselberg's apartment in New York City as well as payment of tuition expenses for his family members and payment of leases on Mercedes Benz cars owned by him and his wife.

The charges against the Trump Organization come after at least three years of tax-related investigations against the former president, whom tax return documents reported by the New York Times last year showed did not pay any taxes for at least a decade before his successful 2016 campaign for the White House.

It was not immediately clear how the charges could impact the political future of Trump, who has hinted at another run for the White House in 2024 after losing last year to Democratic rival Joe Biden.

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US Sees China's Accelerated Buildup of Nuclear Arms as 'Concerning' - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) - The United States is concerned about China's accelerated buildup of its nuclear arsenal, US State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Thursday. "These reports and other developments suggest that the PRC's [China] nuclear arsenal will grow more quickly and to a higher level than perhaps previously anticipated," Price said when asked about reports that Beijing is building more than 100 nuclear missile silos. "This buildup, it is concerning and it raises questions about the PRC's intents."

Price emphasized that China's nuclear buildup reinforces the need for arms control measures and noted that Washington is urging Beijing to work together on arms control in order to avoid destabilizing arms races.

China is deviating from decades of nuclear strategy based around minimum deterrence, Price said.

Satellite images have revealed the construction of 119 missile silos in China's Gansu province. China is believed to have an arsenal of 250 to 350 nuclear weapons, according to published reports.

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Building Collapses in Washington, DC Trapping 1, Several Injured – Fire Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) – One person is trapped, several injured following a building collapse in Washington, DC with two adjacent homes evacuated and active rescue effort ongoing, District of Columbia Fire Department said on Thursday.

"Building collapse 900 block Kennedy St NW. #DCsBravest are engaged in active rescue effort to reach and remove 1 trapped worker. We have removed several other workers who were injured & evacuated 2 adjacent homes," the Fire Department said in a tweet.

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IMF Approves \$11.6Mln For Caribbean St. Vincent and Grenadines to Address Volcano Eruption

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) – A request for aid by the Caribbean island nation of St. Vincent and the Grenadines to address damage from a volcanic eruption won approval of a \$11.6 million disbursement from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) on Thursday.

“The IMF Executive Board approved the request by St. Vincent and the Grenadines for emergency financing assistance of about US\$11.6 million under the Large Natural Disaster Window (LNDW) of the Rapid Credit Facility (RCF),” an IMF press release said.

The RCF will help address the urgent balance of payment needs associated with the ongoing eruption of the La Soufriere volcano, the release said.

According to IMF staff's estimates, the eruption may result in economic losses of up to 30 percent of GDP as infrastructure, housing and crops are damaged, the release added.

A massive eruption of the La Soufriere volcano in early April followed an emergency evacuation order imposed after the volcano became active in December 2020. The volcano last erupted in 1979.

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Rumsfeld Legacy Defined by Dysfunctional Weapons Programs, Illegal Wars - Ex-Officials

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) - Former US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld leaves behind wrecked weapons programs topped only by the lies he told to justify illegal wars, ex-security and intelligence officials told Sputnik.

Rumsfeld, widely considered the architect of the US invasions of Afghanistan in 2001 and of Iraq in 2003, died at the age of 88 in Taos, New Mexico on Wednesday. Rumsfeld as President George W. Bush's defense chief, had openly vowed to modernize the US military and transform the weapons development process.

“[Rumsfeld] did not fix the Pentagon's programmatic pathologies and made some worse,” former Defense Department analyst Chuck Spinney said. “He magnified the perverse effects of concurrency with his policy of spiral development, which is being carried out today in the rapid prototyping concept.”

Spinney said Rumsfeld put weapons into production before they were fully designed and successfully tested in an operational environment, then claimed the US could “fix” them once deployed.

"This creates unworkable junk, huge profits for contractors and extortionary cost growth," Spinney said. "The F-35 [Lightning II Joint Strike Fighter] and Ballistic Missile Defense are two prominent cases in point."

Former FBI special agent Coleen Rowley, a leading Bureau analyst on the Iraq War, believes Rumsfeld should be remembered for the rationales he fabricated as a basis to invade other countries.

"While the media obituaries are taking Rumsfeld to task for 'mistakes' he made in prosecuting the wars on Iraq and Afghanistan, he seems to get a pass for having concocted all the lame and false justifications used to launch the illegal wars in the first place," she said.

Former senior CIA analyst Ray McGovern recalled how Rumsfeld liked to say "some people lie and think they can get away with it."

"And he Rumsfeld personified personal proof of this dictum of his," McGovern told Sputnik. "He was never confronted about his lies."

During his tenure as US defense secretary, Rumsfeld had come under fire for the alleged mistreatment of prisoners at Guantanamo Bay and enhanced interrogation techniques that many rights groups believe amounted to torture. He was also known for witty - yet controversial - quotes including the now famous (or infamous) "there are known unknowns" about intelligence matters.

Rumsfeld served as US Defense Secretary twice, under President Gerald Ford in the 1970s and in the George W. Bush administration from 2001-2006. He also served in the US Navy from 1954 to 1957 as a pilot and a flight instructor, then continued his service as a reservist until 1975, according to the Pentagon. In a statement on Wednesday, current Pentagon chief Lloyd Austin said he was saddened to hear about Rumsfeld's death, hailing him for his "probing intellect," and abiding commitment to the United States.

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US Sees China's Accelerated Buildup of Nuclear Arsenal as 'Concerning' - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) - The United States is concerned about China's accelerated buildup of its nuclear arsenal, US State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Thursday. "These reports and other developments suggest that the PRC's [China] nuclear arsenal will grow more quickly and to a higher level than perhaps previously anticipated," Price said when asked about reports that Beijing is building more than 100 nuclear missile silos. "This buildup, it is concerning and it raises questions about the PRC's intents."

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UN Security Council Likely to Hold Open Meeting on Tigray Friday - President

UNITED NATIONS, July 1 (Sputnik) - The UN Security Council will likely meet on Friday for a public discussion of the situation in Ethiopia's Tigray region, French Ambassador to the United Nations Nicolas de Riviere, who presides with the Security Council in July, said on Thursday. "It is likely to take place, it needs to be confirmed," de Riviere said when asked to verify whether the Security Council plans to hold such meeting on Tigray. "I am pretty confident that it will take place."

The French ambassador added that he thinks the meeting will be public.

The meeting, if confirmed, will be the Security Council's first public discussion of the conflict between the Ethiopian government and the opposition Tigray People's Liberation Front that broke out on November 4, 2020.

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Trump Slams Democrats After Indictment of His Organization, Its Executive Over Tax Charges

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) – Former US President Donald Trump on Thursday has slammed Democrats following the indictment of his Organization and its chief financial officer Allen Weisselberg with the criminal tax charges.

"The political Witch Hunt by the Radical Left Democrats, with New York now taking over the assignment, continues. It is dividing our Country like never before!" Trump said via his Telegram channel.

Earlier on Thursday, one of the most important figures of the Trump Organization Weisselberg pleaded not guilty in a New York court to tax crimes charges ranging over 15 years. He was indicted on 15 felony counts that included a scheme to defraud, conspiracy, grand larceny, falsifying of business records, and was release without bail after the hearings with the requirement to surrender his passport.

Also on Thursday, New York Attorney General Letitia James said that tax evasion investigations into activities of the Trump Organization will continue.

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US House Ethics Panel Waives Republican Lawmaker's \$5,000 Metal Detector Fine

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) -The US House Ethics Committee on Thursday said it dismissed a \$5,000 fine issued to Republican Congresswoman Virginia Foxx for evading a metal detector checkpoint.

"On May 14, 2021, the Committee received a notification from the Office of the Sergeant at Arms that Representative Virginia Foxx has been fined pursuant to House Resolution 73. Representative Foxx appealed the fine to the Committee... On June 29, 2021, a majority of the Committee agreed to the appeal," the panel said in a statement.

Following the January 6 incident at the US Capitol, the House passed a resolution which authorizes the Sergeant at Arms to impose a fine on members who fail to comply with security screening prior to entering the House chamber. The first violation results in a \$5,000 dollar fine, and the second, a \$10,000 one.

A Capitol Police report on the violation detailed Foxx's purported actions, which include running through the magnetometer and activating the alarm, throwing her bag underneath a nearby table, and refusing to comply with officers who attempted to stop her. It added that she claimed to be loudly stating that she was late for a meeting and would not be slowing down for the checkpoint.

The committee also dismissed fines against James Clyburn and Hal Rogers last month, although they have upheld them on three other occasions since implementing the resolution, against Republican Congressmen Louie Gohmert, Andrew Clyde, and Lloyd Smucker.

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US Man Sentenced to 30 Years For Attacking 2 Marshals, Deputy Sheriff - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) – A US court sentenced a South Carolina man accused of shooting at a deputy sheriff and later threatening two US Marshals with a handgun to 30 years in federal prison without the possibility of parole, the Justice Department said on Thursday. "Evidence presented in court showed that, just after 2:00 AM on March 22, 2018, a deputy with the Berkeley County Sheriff's Office attempted to stop a truck for traffic violations. While the truck initially slowed and pulled into a gas station parking lot, it quickly pulled out and led the deputy on a high-speed chase into a residential subdivision. The driver of the vehicle, later identified as [Ricky DeWayne] Johnson, made a U-turn in a neighborhood and fired a .45 caliber pistol at the pursuing deputy," Justice said in a press release.

When the deputy took cover, Johnson sped off and made his way to a cul-de-sac in the neighborhood, where he exited the vehicle and ran from the deputy. Upon searching the truck, which had been stolen, deputies located a spent casing for a .45 caliber round and a .22 caliber handgun, the release said.

Hours later, two members of the US Marshals Fugitive Task Force located Johnson, activated blue lights, and pulled up behind Johnson in an attempt to apprehend him. Johnson attempted to flee and, during the ensuing foot chase, pulled a handgun from his jacket and pointed it at the pursuing Marshals, the release added.

US District Court Judge Margaret Seymour sentenced Johnson to the statutory maximum of 30 years in federal prison, without the possibility of parole, followed by a three-year term of court-ordered supervision, according to the release.

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UNSC to Fully Return to In-Person Meetings in July With Ministers Invited - President

UNITED NATIONS, July 1 (Sputnik) - The UN Security Council will, for the first time since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, fully return to meeting in-person this month, including with ministers invited to UN Headquarters in New York City to take part, Council President for July, French Ambassador to the United Nations Nicolas de Riviere said on Thursday.

"In July, if health conditions allow, the meetings will be held completely in-person. There will be no longer any video conferences. So the participants will be in-person participants, including ministers that are invited," de Riviere said in a press briefing on France's presidency.

He added that French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian will participate in such meetings on July 15 on the situation in Libya and July 16 to discuss the protection of civilians in conflict.

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Trump Organization Probe to Continue After CFO Indictment - New York AG

NEW YORK, July 1 (Sputnik) - Investigations into the Trump Organization will continue after the indictment of its Chief Financial Officer Allen Weisselberg on tax crimes, New York Attorney General Letitia James said on Thursday.

"This investigation will continue, and we will follow the facts and the law wherever they may lead," James said in a statement distributed via Twitter.

Weisselberg pleaded not guilty in a New York court on Thursday to tax crimes charges ranging over 15 years while running the business empire of the former US president. He was indicted on 15 felony counts that included a scheme to defraud, conspiracy, grand larceny and falsifying of business records.

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US Public Voices Concern Proposed Ban on Belarus Flights May Be Illegal, Cut Off Families

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) - More than one hundred people in the United States submitted comments to the Department of Transportation urging the agency to terminate plans to ban the sale of flights between the United States and Belarus due to the Ryanair incident on both legal and humanitarian grounds.

Earlier this week, the Department of Transportation announced it issued an order proposing a ban on the sale of flights between the United States and Belarus, but it allowed the public to submit their opinion on the matter until July 1.

"I have a 4 year old son, I want him to know where he came from and to preserve his heritage," Veranika Barysevich said in a comment to the agency. "I want him to be able to go and see his grandmothers and grandfather. Please do not deprive him of that."

Oleg Kalosha submitted a comment to the Transportation Department pointing out that the US government sanctioned certain Belarus officials, so this measure would only create problems for US citizens with strong family ties to Belarus.

"I am a US Citizen and I strongly oppose this order. It infringes on human rights and liberties. It also violates the Constitution of the United States and international laws," Jared Benson wrote to the agency. "For instance, Article 13 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights reads: Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country. This proposed order violates multiple laws and should be denied."

Another individual, Jacob Ryder, said limiting travel and freedom of movement contradicts the United States' mission to try to promote American values. He added that this proposed rule is a move towards authoritarianism, not a display of solidarity with the Belarusian people.

On June 21, the US Treasury Department designated 16 people and five entities from Belarus, including the State Security Committee (KGB) and press secretary of the Belarusian President, as part of the new sanctions package related to the Ryanair incident in May.

Overall, the Department of Transportation has received more than 150 comments from the US public on this matter, most opposing the proposed rule.

In late May, a Ryanair airplane flying from Athens to Vilnius landed in Minsk over a bomb threat flagged by the Belarusian authorities that turned out to be false. The authorities detained passenger Roman Protasevich, whose Telegram channel Nexta is said to have played a crucial part during last year's post-election unrest and has been designated as being extremist.

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Pandemic-Related Mental Health Woes Hit Over Half of US Public Health Workers – CDC Report

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) – Mental health difficulties affected more than half of public health workers, a recent survey published by the US Centers for Disease Control (CDC) on Thursday showed.

To evaluate mental health conditions, an online survey was conducted from March 29 to April 16, 2021, to assess symptoms of depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and suicidal ideation among public health workers in state, tribal, local, and territorial public health departments, the report said.

"Among 26,174 respondents, 53.0% reported symptoms of at least one mental health condition in the preceding 2 weeks, including depression (32.0%), anxiety (30.3%), PTSD (36.8%), or suicidal ideation (8.4%)," the report said.

For comparison, the overall prevalence of symptoms of mental health conditions among public health workers was higher than the 40.9% level previously reported in the general population, the report added.

The survey sample consisted of responses to questionnaires emailed from multiple health-worker membership associations, according to the report.

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Delta Variant to Become Predominant Coronavirus Mutation Across US in Coming Weeks - CDC

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) - The Delta variant is the second most prevalent coronavirus mutation in the United States and is predicted to become the predominant one in the coming weeks mainly affecting the regions with low vaccination rates, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Director Rochelle Walensky said on Thursday.

"The Delta variant is predicted to be the second most prevalent variant in the United States, and I expect that in the coming weeks, it will eclipse the Alpha variant. An estimated 25 percent of all reported SARS-COV-2 sequences nationwide are the Delta variants, and in some regions of the country, nearly one in two sequences is a Delta variant," Walensky said during a press briefing. Walensky underscored the correlation that exists between the low vaccination rates and the spread of the Delta variant. She quoted data that approximately 1000 US counties have reported vaccination rates of less than 30 percent while these communities are primarily located in the South, East and Midwest of the country.

The Delta strain is believed to be the fastest spreading and most contagious coronavirus variant, according to reports.

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Trump Organization CFO Allen Weisselberg Pleads 'Not Guilty' To Tax Crime Charges

NEW YORK, July 1 (Sputnik) - Trump Organization Chief Financial Officer Allen Weisselberg pleaded not guilty in a New York court on Thursday to tax crimes charges ranging over 15 years while running the business empire of the former US president.

The indictment against the Trump Organization and Trump Payroll Corporation describes a 15-year tax scheme and includes 15 felony counts, including a scheme to defraud, conspiracy, grand larceny and falsifying business records.

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US Upgrades Belarus on Human Trafficking Tier System After Reform Efforts - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) - Belarus has received a better tier placement in the 2021 Trafficking in Persons Report following efforts to reform practices in the country, the US State Department said in the report on Thursday.

"The government of Belarus does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking but is making significant efforts to do so. The government made key achievements during the reporting period, considering the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on its anti-trafficking capacity; therefore Belarus was upgraded to Tier 2 Watch List," the report said. The report said while the Belarussian government continued the practice of national and regional level "subbotnik" days of service, in contrast to previous years, approximately 500,000 fewer people participated in the 2020 national subbotnik without any reports of retaliation by the authorities.

Additional achievements featured in the report included amending the national referral mechanism to improve victim identification and assistance, requiring the recording of child victim and witness testimony during pre-trial investigation for later use in court to reduce possible re-traumatization.

However, the report also found that the Belarussian government did not report investigating or filing charges related to illegal recruitment of migrant workers for the fourth consecutive year in spite of data collected by NGOs suggesting the majority of trafficking victims are men subjected to forced labor, primarily in Russia, Poland, Turkey and other countries throughout Europe and the Middle East.

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US House Committee Moves to Block Biden From Waiving Nord Stream 2 Sanctions

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) - The US House Appropriations Committee has advanced a measure that would block the US president from waiving Nord Stream 2 sanctions in the fiscal year 2022.

"[This amendment aims] to restore energy security in central and eastern Europe, including Ukraine, by repealing the Russian Nord Stream 2 gas stream pipeline waiver moving forward. This amendment would repeal the waiver for Nord Stream 2 sanctions in fiscal year 2022..." Congresswoman Marcy Kaptur, who added the amendment, said.

She called the gas pipeline "a political weapon to undermine" Europe's energy security.

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Turkey's Withdrawal from Istanbul Convention 'Deeply Disappointing' - US State Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) - US State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Thursday that Turkey's withdrawal from the Istanbul convention on preventing and combating violence against women was deeply disappointing.

"Turkey's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention is deeply disappointing and a step backward for the international effort to end violence against women," Price said in a statement. "We urge all states to strengthen their prevention of and response to all forms of gender-based violence." The Istanbul Convention is a human rights treaty backed by the Council of Europe. It was adopted in May 2011 in the Turkish city of Istanbul and has entered into force in August 2014.

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Turkey Becomes First NATO Member Added to US Child Soldier Prevention List - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) - Turkey has been added to the US' 2021 Child Soldiers Prevention Act (CSPA) List for its support for non-state armed groups that use child soldiers, a senior State Department official said on Thursday.

"This is the first time a NATO member has been listed on the Child Soldier Prevention Act list. As a respected regional leader and member of NATO, Turkey has the opportunity to address this issue – the recruitment and use of child soldiers in Syria and Libya," the official said. They elaborated that the US determined and documented that the government of Turkey provided support to the Sultan Murad Division, a non-state armed group in Syria that uses child soldiers.

The CSPA prohibits several forms of military assistance to the listed governments, as well as prohibiting the issuance of licenses for direct commercial sales of military equipment to such governments. The prohibitions will take effect on October 1, 2021 and be in effect throughout Fiscal Year 2022, absent a presidential waiver, applicable exception, or reinstatement of assistance pursuant to the terms of the CSPA.

The senior State Department official added that the US hopes to work with Turkey to address the issue moving forward and encourage other groups involved in the Syrian and Libyan conflicts not to use child soldiers.

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US Supreme Court Decision Disappointing, Undercuts Minorities' Voting Rights - Biden

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden criticized a US Supreme Court decision limiting voting rights in the Brnovich versus Democratic National Committee case and said he was "deeply disappointed" by it, the White House said on Thursday.

"I am deeply disappointed in today's decision by the United States Supreme Court that undercuts the Voting Rights Act, and upholds what Justice Kagan called "a significant race-based disparity in voting opportunities," Biden said in a statement.

In a 6-3 decision, the US Supreme Court upheld Arizona's policies weakening Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act, which allows voters to seek relief if a state or local government denies or cuts back on voting rights based on race. Human Rights Campaign President Alfonso David said the ruling delivered a major blow to the 1965 act.

"In a span of just eight years, the Court has now done severe damage to two of the most important provisions of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 a law that took years of struggle and strife to secure," Biden said.

Additional federal laws are now needed to safeguard the US election system and to strengthen election security to address the threats of election subversion from abroad and at home, Biden added.

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UN Weather Agency Confirms New Record High Temperature for Antarctic Continent - Statement

UNITED NATIONS, July 1 (Sputnik) - The UN World Meteorological Organization (WMO) on Thursday confirmed a new maximum temperature record for the Antarctic of 18.3 degrees Celsius (64.9 degrees Fahrenheit).

"The WMO has recognized a new record high temperature for the Antarctic continent of 18.3° Celsius on February 6, 2020, at the Esperanza station (Argentina)," the agency said in a press release.

WMO Secretary-General Petteri Taalas said it was essential to verify the record high temperature for the Antarctic Peninsula, which is among the fastest-warming regions - almost 3 degrees Celsius over the last 50 years.

"This new temperature record is therefore consistent with the climate change we are observing," Taalas said.

The previous record verified by the WMO for the Antarctic continent was 17.5 degrees Celsius (63.5 degrees Fahrenheit) recorded on March 24, 2015, at Esperanza Research Station.

WMO simultaneously rejected the previous record for the Antarctic region of 20.7 degrees Celsius (69.3 degrees Fahrenheit) reported on February 9, 2020, on Seymour Island.

The WMO's Weather and Climate Extremes Archive, which reviewed the weather situation on the Antarctic peninsula at the time of both records, determined downslope winds producing significant surface warming resulted in local warming at both Esperanza Station and Seymour Island.

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Trump Team Launches New Social Media Platform Called 'GETTR' - Reports

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump's team has launched a new social media platform called GETTR, Politico reported citing a person familiar with the matter.

The report said Trump's former spokesman, Jason Miller, is the head of the company but it is unclear what Trump's role is with the platform.

The description for the GETTR app advertises it as a non-bias social network.

In June, Miller announced that Trump's blog titled "From the Desk of Donald J. Trump" shut down less than a month after it was launched. The blog was launched on May 4 as a way for the former president to communicate with the public without having to use one of the major social media platforms.

Trump was banned from major social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook following the incident at the Capitol Complex on January 6. The platforms deemed that his activities in relation to the event violated their policies.

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Cheney Future Committee Assignments Unlikely After Joining January 6 Riot Probe - McCarthy

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) - US House Republican lawmaker Liz Cheney, who accepted an appointment by Speaker Nancy Pelosi to serve on a Democrat-led probe of the January 6 riot in the Capitol, should not expect to receive future committee assignments from fellow Republicans, Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy said on Thursday.

"I was shocked that she [Cheney] would accept something from Speaker Pelosi," McCarthy said. "It was shocking to me that if a person is a Republican they get committee assignments from the Republican conference. For somebody to accept committee assignments from speaker Pelosi, that's unprecedented."

McCarthy pointed out that the way the House of Representative works is that Republicans appoint Republicans and Democrats appoint Democrats.

Earlier on Thursday, Pelosi named Cheney to serve on a newly created committee to investigate the January 6 riot at the US Capitol building by a group of Trump supporters. Cheney's selection followed her recent removal from the House Republican leadership team over her criticism of Trump's role in attack.

The House resolution establishing the committee gives Pelosi a veto over Republican appointments of five lawmakers to the 13-member panel.

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Miami Residents Express Solidarity, Support for Surfside After Building Collapse

SURFSIDE, June 30 (Sputnik) - Miami residents are providing support to nearby Surfside after the collapse of a residential building there and amid continuing search and rescue efforts for survivors.

The owners of the local business Flowers For Heroes said they have been continually bringing flowers to memorial site of the collapsed building in Surfside.

"We are taking the flowers on behalf of the initiative called Flowers For Heroes. With other local flower distributors we are taking we are taking them to the memorial to place them to honor all the victims and their families," owner Tania Sequera told Sputnik.

Sequera said she and her two daughters were loading their vehicle with multiple boxes and bouquets donated by local companies and distributors. However, she said they had to wait to deliver them until the authorities reopened the adjacent streets when President Joe Biden arrived in the area.

"It's very important to have solidarity with the people, with the families of the victims," Sequera said. "It's a tragedy. I think it's very important what is happening here and to heal. It is very painful."

Sequera also said she and her daughters have been at the site of the incident since the very beginning and will remain there to provide any support to the affected people. She said she had resided in Surfside in the past and described it as a quiet and friendly place.

Many people are delivering flowers themselves to the site. One local resident told Sputnik that he comes there every day and has not lost hope that more people will be found alive in the rubble.

"These people are my neighbors. These are the people I have seen in the supermarket and they deserve respect," the resident said. "We are in mourning. Of course, we have hope and I have a lot of faith in God."

Earlier on Thursday, Miami-Dade County Mayor Daniella Levine Cava said search and rescue efforts were halted overnight due to concerns about the standing structure's stability and will resume once it is safe to do so. She also said Biden's arrival will not affect the operations on the ground.

The death toll stands at 18 and 147 residents of the building are still unaccounted for, according to the local authorities.

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US State Dept. Lists Dozens of Central American Officials in Corruption Report to Congress

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) - The US State Department in a report to Congress listed dozens of former and current officials from three Central American states for alleged corruption. "The report includes individuals for whom the Department is aware of credible information or allegations of the conduct at issue, from media reporting and other sources. The Department will continue to review the individuals listed in the report and consider all available tools to deter and disrupt corrupt, undemocratic activity in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras," the report said.

Individuals listed on the report include the former presidents of Guatemala and Honduras as well as numerous presidential aides, more than a dozen Honduran lawmakers, and two judges currently serving on the Guatemalan Supreme Court.

The department said it will continue to review credible allegations and ensure corrupt officials are denied safe haven in the United States.

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Russia, China and Others Have 'Policy and Pattern' of Human Trafficking - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) - Russia, China, and nine other governments demonstrate a pattern of engaging in various forms of human trafficking, the US State Department's 2021 Trafficking in Persons Report published on Thursday said.

"The 2021 Trafficking in Persons Report includes... 11 governments with a documented 'policy or pattern' of human trafficking, trafficking in government-funded programs, forced labor in government-affiliated medical services or other sectors, sexual slavery in government camps, or the employment or recruitment of child soldiers," the report said.

The 11 countries designated include Afghanistan, Burma (Myanmar), China, Cuba, Eritrea, North Korea, Iran, Russia, South Sudan, Syria, and Turkmenistan.

The designation was added to the Trafficking Victims Protection Act by Congress in 2019 as a way to acknowledge and address governments who also act as traffickers. Receiving the designation directly links government involvement in trafficking to a Tier 3 rating, which comes with restrictions on aid.

Last year – the first year that the annual report included the new provision – the 11 current countries were also joined by Belarus, who has since had the designation removed and been upgraded to a Tier 2 Watch List rating.

Russian officials have previously slammed the State Department for trying to divide nations with this report, which they said is based purely on America's political sympathies.

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US House Republicans Form 7 Groups to Set Agenda for Desired 2023 Majority - McCarthy

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) - Seven issue-specific Republican task forces in the US House of Representatives will draft plans for an anticipated return to a majority in the November 2022 midterm elections, Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy said on Thursday.

"These task forces will work over the next couple months to build on our Commitment to America agenda that we released last year. When we are in the majority in January 2023, we'll be much different than the Democrats," McCarthy said.

Topics the task forces will work on include jobs and the economy, big-tech censorship, energy and climate change, American security, and China accountability, McCarthy said.

McCarthy cited several themes that Republicans plan to work in upcoming midterm election campaigns, blaming the Biden administration policies for the highest inflation in more than a decade, a spike in violent crime and a surge in migration across the southern US border.

With a slim 218-212 majority, analysts say Democrats face an uphill battle to keep control of the House in the 2022 elections, given a history in which the party controlling the White House typically loses seats in the midterm vote.

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Biden Thanks First Responders, Rescue Teams for Efforts at Collapsed Florida Building Site

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden on Thursday expressed gratitude to the search and rescue teams as well as first responders for their efforts at the collapsed residential building site in Surfside, Florida.

Biden arrived at the site earlier in the day and has already met with Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, Miami-Dade County Mayor Daniella Levine Cava and other officials to be briefed on the latest developments.

"What you're doing here is an incredible having to deal with uncertainty, worrying about the families," Biden told the responders.

Earlier on Thursday, Miami-Dade Fire Rescue Chief Alan Cominsky acknowledged the search and rescue teams have been working in an unsafe environment and reiterated that the operation aims to rescue potential survivors.

The authorities have confirmed that 18 people have died in the collapsed building but 147 people are unaccounted for. The US Department of Commerce's National Institute of Standards and Technology has launched a probe into the incident.

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OECD Says 130 Nations Agree to Minimum Tax, US Treasury Chief Calls Deal 'Historic'

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) - Some 130 countries have agreed to support a minimum global tax, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) announced Thursday, with US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen calling the deal "historic".

Countries debating a worldwide corporate tax reform have agreed to a minimum rate of 15 percent to be implemented by 2023, the OECD announced. It said the accord was expected to be finalized by October this year, with the tentative support of at least 130 nations.

"Today is an historic day for economic diplomacy," Yellen said in a statement, responding to the OECD announcement. "For decades, the United States has participated in a self-defeating international tax competition, lowering our corporate tax rates only to watch other nations lower theirs in response. The result was a global race to the bottom. No nation has won this race." Lower tax rates not only failed to attract new businesses, but also deprived countries of funding for important investments like infrastructure, education, and efforts to combat the pandemic, the treasury secretary said.

"Today's agreement by 130 countries representing more than 90 percent of global GDP is a clear sign: the race to the bottom is one step closer to coming to an end," Yellen said. "In its place, America will enter a competition that we can win; one judged on the skill of our workers and the strength of our infrastructure."

The move toward a global minimum for taxes came after US President Joe Biden demanded that large US companies "pay their fair share," and vowed to crack down on those that employed complicated maneuvers to reduce or eliminate their tax obligations altogether by shifting income on paper between countries.

More than a thousand big, mostly American corporations — including eBay, Google, Facebook, PayPal, Microsoft, Yahoo, AOL, Twitter, Intel, Pfizer, Boston Scientific and Johnson & Johnson — have their tax base in Ireland to take advantage of corporate taxes there that stand at just 12.5 percent, compared with the US rate of 21 percent.

Some US companies also park their profits in tax havens to avoid paying any tax at all.

California-based Apple, for instance, has its tax base in the island of Jersey, which is located in the English Channel between England and France and has zero corporate tax.

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US, UK Intelligence Agencies Accuse Russia's GRU of 'Malicious Cyber Activities'- Advisory

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) - The US and UK intelligence communities issued an advisory on Thursday warning of alleged malicious cyber activities by the Russian military intelligence unit, known as the GRU.

"The National Security Agency (NSA), Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA), Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the UK's National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) released a Cybersecurity Advisory today exposing malicious cyber activities by Russian military intelligence against US and global organizations, starting from mid-2019 and likely ongoing," the advisory said.

The advisory details the methods the GRU may use to breach networks.

The advisory said Russia's GRU has allegedly targeted hundreds of US and foreign organizations, but mostly entities in Europe and the United States, including US Defense Department entities.

The advisory comes in the wake of cyberattacks against the US government and private companies, including the Microsoft Exchange and SolarWinds hacks, as well as ransomware attacks on Colonial Pipeline and meat producer JBS Foods.

Russia has repeatedly denied any involvement in cyber activity targeted against the United States.

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Surfside Residents Mourn Building Collapse Victims By Bringing Flowers at Site

SURFSIDE, June 30 (Sputnik) - Surfside residents continue to bring flowers and notes of support at the site of the partially collapsed Champlain Towers South building or leave such items on the fences of nearby buildings.

Some of the signs left at the site read "Surfside, God is With You," "Never forget 062421 Surfside" and "God Bless each and every person affected by this collapse and surround them with your love, protection and angels."

Police has shut down streets in a ten-block radius from the building given that President Joe Biden is visiting the area. Despite the heightened security measures and excessive heat, however, people are still walking around or standing on the streets in a sign of collective support.

The feeling of mourning in Surfside is palpable and it appears that many people even refrain from talking loudly.

Earlier on Thursday, Miami-Dade County Mayor Daniella Levine Cava said search and rescue efforts were halted overnight at the building collapse site due to concerns about the standing structure's stability and will resume once it is safe to do so. She also said Biden's arrival will not affect the operations on the ground.

The death toll in the incident stands at 18 and 147 residents of the building are still unaccounted for.

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Pelosi Picks Democrat Thompson to Lead Jan. 6 Capitol Riot Probe, Includes Liz Cheney

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) – Democratic US Congressman Bennie Thompson from Mississippi will lead the House Select Committee to investigate the storming of the US Capitol building on January 6, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said on Thursday.

"The next step for us is to find the truth in the most patriotic and nonpartisan way: Chairman Bennie Thompson of Mississippi [will head the committee]," Pelosi told a Capitol Hill press conference.

Pelosi named seven other members of Congress to sit on the committee, including Republican Liz Cheney, daughter of former Vice President Dick Cheney and a prominent critic of former President Donald Trump.

"Yesterday, the House established the Select Committee to Investigate the January 6 Attack on the US Capitol. Today, I am proud to name Members who will patriotically honor our oath and our responsibility to the American people: to seek the truth," Pelosi said in an accompanying statement.

The committee will be chaired by Thompson, who is chair of the Homeland Security Committee, by Congresswoman Zoe Lofgren and by Congressman Adam Schiff, chair of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, the statement added.

The committee will be bipartisan, with thirteen members appointed by the Speaker, five of whom will be appointed after consultation with Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy, the statement added.

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US, UK Intelligence Agencies Accuse Russia's GRU of 'Malicious Cyber Activities - Advisory

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The advisory details the methods the GRU may use to breach networks.

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Biden Briefed on Rescue Efforts at Collapsed Florida Building by Governor, Mayor

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) – US President Joe Biden has received a briefing on rescue efforts at the collapsed residential building site in Surfside, Florida as the search and rescue operations have entered the eighth day.

Florida governor Ron DeSantis and Miami-Dade County Mayor Daniella Levine Cava were among the officials at the briefing.

"We're not going anywhere," Biden said, urging those at the table to "tell me what you need." He added that it is necessary to provide families of the victims with psychological help in the days and months that follow.

The tragedy in Surfside took place in the early hours of Thursday morning last week when a 12-story residential building partially collapsed. The death toll in the incident stands at 18 with 147 residents still unaccounted for. The US Department of Commerce's National Institute of Standards and Technology has launched a probe into the incident.

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Non-Fossil Fuels Provide 21% of US Energy in 2020, Highest Since Early 1900s- Energy Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) - Nuclear power and renewables supplied more than 20 percent of the energy used in the United States last year, a level not seen for non-fossil fuels in the past century, the Energy Information Administration (EIA) said on Thursday.

"Fossil fuels - specifically petroleum, natural gas, and coal - accounted for 79 percent of total US energy consumption in 2020. About 21 percent of US energy consumption in 2020 came from non-fossil fuel sources such as renewables and nuclear - the highest share since the early 1900s," an EIA report said.

Among US non-fossil fuel energy sources, renewable energy consumption increased from 11.4 quadrillion British thermal units (quads) in 2019 to a record high of 11.6 quads in 2020.

Renewable energy was the only U.S. fuel source whose share of total energy consumption increased in 2020, the report added.

In the early 20th century, hydropower provided the biggest source of energy in the United States with wood a distant second, according to reports.

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UN Urges Israel to Allow Aid Into Gaza, Both Sides to Return to Talks

UNITED NATIONS, July 1 (Sputnik) - UN Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo on Thursday called on Israel to facilitate the flow of humanitarian aid into Gaza and urged both sides to return to negotiations supported by the Middle East Quartet.

DiCarlo asked the international community to generously respond to the Gaza humanitarian appeal seeking \$164 million to deliver reconstruction aid after the most recent escalation between Hamas and Israel in May.

"I join the appeals to Israel to facilitate the entry of humanitarian aid and reconstruction materials into Gaza," DiCarlo said at the UN International Conference on the Question of Jerusalem.

"I urge Israeli and Palestinian leaders, supported by a revitalized Quartet, to recommit to a path of credible negotiations to address all the key outstanding permanent status issues," she added. DiCarlo also appealed to Hamas and other militant groups in Gaza to refrain from attacks and provocations that risk destabilizing the situation.

Deadly clashes in East Jerusalem over evictions of Palestinians early last month led to the worst violence between Israel and Palestinians in the Gaza Strip in recent years. Palestinian militants launched several thousand rockets toward Israel. In response, Israel fired retaliatory strikes against Gaza. In Israel, 12 people were killed and over 50 were seriously wounded during the hostilities. The death toll among Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, Jerusalem and the West Bank topped 270.

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Rescuers at Miami Collapse Site Heard Female Voices For Several Hours - Rescue Chief

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) – The rescue teams operating at the site of the collapsed residential building in Surfside heard audible female voices coming from the rubble for several hours but then the voices stopped, Miami-Dade Fire Rescue Chief Alan Cominsky said on Thursday, adding that the teams will continue searching for survivors.

"We did hear audible sounds, and they were searching for female voices. We heard [these voices] for several hours but eventually, we did not hear a voice anymore," he said at a briefing to the press.

He added that the teams have been working in an unsafe environment and reiterated that the operation aims to rescue victims and continue search efforts.

Rescue operations have been underway at the collapse site since the building in the outskirts of Miami, Florida collapsed last week. The death toll currently stands at 18, with 147 residents being still unaccounted for. The US Department of Commerce's National Institute of Standards and Technology has launched a probe into the incident.

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Biden Visit Not to Impact Rescue Operations at Florida Building Collapse Site - Mayor

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden's visit to the collapsed residential building site in Surfside, Florida, will not affect the search and rescue operations there, Miami-Dade County Mayor Daniella Levine Cava said on Thursday.

Biden left Washington earlier in the day and is currently meeting with rescue crews and relatives of those still unaccounted for in building collapse incident.

"President Biden's visit today will have no impact on what happens at the site. The search and rescue operation will continue as soon as it is safe to do so," Cava said.

The 12-story residential building in Surfside partially collapsed in the early hours last Thursday. Since, massive search and rescue operations have been undertaken to pull residents out from the rubble. The death toll in the incident stands at 18 with 147 residents still unaccounted for. The US Department of Commerce's National Institute of Standards and Technology has recently launched an investigation into the causes of the building collapse. According to US media reports, an engineer who inspected the building three years ago warned the owners of major structural damage and recommended repairs.

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Blue Origin First Human Spaceflight to Include 82-Year-Old Female Pilot - Bezos

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) - An octogenarian female pilot, who completed astronaut training with NASA's project Mercury only to have the Women in Space program canceled, will finally make it to outer space later this month on the private rocket company Blue Origin's first human space flight, company founder Jeff Bezos said on Thursday.

"No one has waited longer," Bezos said of 82-year-old Wally Funk in a Twitter message. "In 1961, Wally Funk was at the top of her class as part of the 'Mercury 13' Woman in Space program. Despite completing their training, the program was cancelled, and none of the thirteen flew."

Fulfilling a lifelong mission to become an astronaut, Funk will fly to space on Blue Origin's first human flight on July 20 as an "honored guest," joining Jeff Bezos, his brother Mark Bezos and the winner of an auction for a fourth seat, a company press release said.

In the 1960s, Funk was the youngest graduate of the Women in Space Program, a privately-funded project that tested female pilots for astronaut fitness. Later known as the Mercury 13 - thirteen American women successfully underwent the same physiological and psychological screening tests as the astronauts selected by NASA for Project Mercury, but they never flew to space, the release said.

Funk later became the first female inspector for the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and the first female air safety investigator for the National Transportation Safety Board, the release added.

Blue Origin created a vertical takeoff and landing system called New Shepard in a bid to open outer space to tourists. The system consists of a rocket designed to jettison a crew capsule at a height of more than 60 miles. The capsule then lingers in zero gravity space for several minutes before returning to earth in a parachute-assisted landing.

A live auction prior to the maiden July 20 flight will award the fourth seat to the highest bidder, the company said earlier.

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Brazil Auto Parts Giant Agrees to Revise Teksid Takeover Deal – Justice Department

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) – Brazilian engine parts company Tupy has agreed to restructure its takeover agreement with the automotive metal castings firm Teksid because of US antitrust concerns, the Department of Justice announced on Thursday.

"Auto parts supplier Tupy agreed to restructure its acquisition of Teksid after the Department of Justice raised concerns that the merger would result in higher prices and reduced quality and timeliness of production for crucial components used in heavy-duty engines," the Justice Department explained in a news release.

As initially proposed, the deal would have combined the two most significant suppliers of engine blocks and cylinder heads for heavy-duty engines to customers in North America as key inputs for engines used in large trucks, construction and agricultural equipment and many other vehicles, the release said.

"Following the restructuring, Tupy will acquire only Teksid's iron operations in Brazil and Portugal. Teksid will retain its iron operations in Mexico and continue to compete with Teksid to supply US customers," the Justice Department said.

Tupy, a Brazilian company, is the largest supplier of iron blocks and heads for heavy-duty engines to customers in North America. Tupy owns four iron foundries, two in Brazil and two in Mexico.

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Search Paused at Florida Collapse Site Due to Structure Stability Concerns - Mayor

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) – Search and rescue efforts were halted overnight at the building collapse site in Surfside, Florida due to concerns about the standing structure's stability and will resume once it is safe to do so, Miami-Dade County Mayor Daniella Levine Cava said on Thursday.

"We were forced to halt operations on flaps in the early hours of the morning due to structural concerns about the standing structure. We are doing everything we can to ensure that the safety of our first responders is paramount, and will continue our search and rescue operation as soon as it is safe to do so," Cava told reporters during a press briefing.

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Trudeau Congratulates Canadians on National Holiday, Urges Reflection on Indigenous Issues

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) - Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on Thursday extended his best wishes to Canadians on the country's national holiday, but noted the occasion is a time for reflection amid the discovery of the remains of hundreds of children at sites of former forced assimilation schools.

In recent weeks, Canadian First Nations communities have uncovered hundreds of unmarked graves at the sites of former residential schools, where indigenous children were forcibly sent to be assimilated into European Canadian society.

"Today, we celebrate our country and everyone who calls it home. We also reflect on everything we have accomplished, and look forward to what more we have to do," Trudeau said in a statement. "While we acknowledge our successes, we must also recognize that, for some, Canada Day is not yet a day of celebration."

Trudeau pointed out that while the past cannot be changed, Canadians can recommit to building a better, fairer and more equitable country.

While the majority of Canadians still plan to commemorate the country's national holiday, according to polls, protests are still planned throughout the country amid an effort to "cancel" Canada Day.

Groups are planned at various locations, including in Vancouver, throughout Ontario and some planning to stage demonstrations in front of Canadian flags.

There have been calls by various groups to cancel the annual Canada Day celebration in commemoration of the country's confederation on July 1 before, however, the grisly discovery has ignited widespread anger throughout the country leading to calls for the country to entirely distance itself from its colonial history.

According to Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission report, released in 2015, roughly 150,000 aboriginal children were forcibly assimilated through the residential schools from 1883 to 1998, in a process equated to "cultural genocide."

The report discovered that around 3,200 died in the schools, with the greatest number of deaths taking place before 1940. Schools also had high rates of tuberculosis and other health incidences in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, with death rates remaining high until the 1950s.